

# Cohort V: A Leadership Model for All of DCMA



by DCMA Leadership Class — Cohort V (submitted by Mr. Stuart Harrow, Chief, Burlington Team, DCMA Philadelphia)



*Lead: to show the way to, or direct the course of,  
by going before or along with; conduct; guide; to mark the way for*

— Webster's New World College Dictionary, 4th ed.

**T**hursday morning, Dec. 9, 2004, a new training day began in Atlanta, Ga., for the 29 Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) supervisors and managers of Cohort V (a cohort is a united group of people sharing a common factor). Group members soon found that although they had much in common — they were among 900 supervisors and managers in DCMA — they were a very diverse group. Some approached the training eagerly — others were apprehensive; some grabbed the chance to attend — many did not want to be there and had come only at their bosses' requests; some were handpicked — others were a second choice. The members also had a range of backgrounds: from first-time, newly-promoted supervisors to those with over 30 years in supervision; from supervisors assigned to a team of five specialists to second-level managers supervising an office

of over 100 people; from DCMA members who began their civil service careers at DCMA and its predecessors to those recently joining DCMA after a military career.

Ms. Pat Roderick, human resources specialist from DCMA West in Carson City, Calif., said that in fiscal year 2004, each District was tasked

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with developing leadership training for its supervisors, managers and executives, and each District offered its own respective leadership training. Late in this fiscal year, DCMA decided to adopt the DCMA District West leadership training model for all DCMA Districts in a conscious effort to give DCMA supervisors the skills needed to help make DCMA “the employer of choice.” Despite budget cuts and shortfalls, this

training has retained its funding and priority. Ms. Roderick has spent the last 20 years offering leadership training to DCMA. Her expertise and

*(Above left)* Class participants summarize what they've learned by dramatizing a learning objective. (Photo by Mr. Scott Scruggs.) *(In the middle)* Cohort V participants Ms. Lena Unverrich, Mr. Mark Rushfeldt and Mr. Gary Curry spend an evening together outside class. (Photo by Mr. Scott Scruggs.) *(Above right)* Instructor Mr. Barry Burgland, Center for Creative Leadership, shares a light moment with Cohort V members Mr. Ed Graves, Mr. Robert Chen, Ms. Mary Pleticha, Mr. Ed Hendela, Ms. Brigitte Bryant and Ms. Janet Lopez. (Photo by Mr. Scott Scruggs.)



(Left) Many exercises draw on communication skills and problem solving. (Photo by Mr. Robert Chen, DCMA District West Headquarters.) (Right) This exercise, “put a straw through a potato,” demonstrated that what we thought was “impossible” turned out to be merely difficult. (Photo by Mr. Robert Chen, DCMA District West Headquarters.)

her work with a dedicated sponsor and leader, Ms. Leslie Gregg, former DCMA District West deputy director, have achieved DCMA’s vision of making the Agency a preferred employer. Following Ms. Roderick, the instructors announced their strictly enforced “no cell phone, pager and/or BlackBerry®” policy<sup>1</sup> during actual classroom learning and then gave a broad overview of the four parts of the curriculum:

- *The Leadership Challenge — Leading Through Change.* This session examined how people deal with change and included skills for initiating and sustaining change.
- *Emotional Intelligence as a Leadership Skill/360-Degree Assessment.* This session provided mechanisms for successfully achieving a balance between our personal and professional lives, thus enabling employees to perform to their maximum potential.
- *Coaching Skills for Federal Executives.* This course covered the difference between coaching and counseling and how to use coaching to help employees realize their potential, focus on their special skills and help others by example.
- *Building a Great Place for People to Work and Leaders Growing Leaders.* This training clarified the difference between viewing a job as “just a job/paycheck” and thinking, “I can’t wait to get to work today to see what challenges are there for me to tackle!” The course also provided methods for identifying people who are willing to accept both the informal and formal roles of



(In the middle) One Cohort member offered tips for retaining a positive outlook in “An Anti-Depression Kit.” Each member contributed freely from his or her life and work experiences. (Photo by Mr. Robert Chen, DCMA District West Headquarters.)

DCMA leaders, because leadership doesn’t always have a formal title.

The classes were designed to provide the tools needed to lead people to excellence. A quote in *The Leadership Challenge* by Mr. Jim Kouzes shows how this ultimately translates into great customer service: “This business is really about people. Our ability to deliver amazing customer service is all about people and making them feel motivated, empowered and trusted. They need to feel that they know what is at stake and how they make a difference. If we are not really committed to our own people, how can we expect them to be committed to our customers?” The class also used ideas from *Primal Leadership* by Mr. Daniel Goleman to bring this focus on customers into sharp relief. One Cohort V member summed up the group’s experience in a rap, which he presented:

*While doin’ time at DCMA,  
Heard primal leadership was the way.  
Being self-aware, having empathy,  
Improves relations, brings harmony.*

*Moving through this chapter of Cohort V,  
Know we learned a lot — that ain’t no jive.*

*When you go home, good luck to all,  
Learned a little something and had a ball!  
Cha-ca-cha, cha-ca cha, cha-ca-cha-ca-cha ...*

<sup>1</sup> BlackBerry® is a registered trademark of the Research In Motion company.

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During the first set of classes, the diverse collection of 29 individuals slowly formed a unified group. Initially, few anticipated the kind of benefits they would receive, but by the end of the course every single person came away with a sense of self-awareness and determination to make things better both personally and professionally. Part of the program is “instrumentation,” where leadership styles, people skills, peer perceptions, decision-making preferences and emotional intelligence were measured.

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As the training progressed, assessment instruments were given but many were confused about their purpose. And then there was light. The program was building toward the day when each member would receive feedback: very personal, focused, relevant and sensitive. Each had the opportunity to meet with a professional “feedback giver” who knew more about the members than they thought possible, and their insights provided growth.

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course. They feel that if they could change so significantly after only seven days, then after graduating from the training, the possibilities for positive outcomes could be endless.

The participants rated the training as very effective. Following are some of the enthusiastic comments from the participants regarding their experiences:

- “Intimidating. Enlightening.”
- “[I feel] fortunate that early in my career I got to take a class like this. It makes me realize the challenge I face.”
- “Advertised by three folks from my office as the best class they’ve had in 32 years.”
- “I’m starting to see a glimmer, that spark of hope that I had when I first started with the Agency.”

Through the training, members learned about themselves and became better leaders as a result. They now see more clearly that the best way to effect organizational culture change is through a focused training program, one cohort at a time. At this time over 120 DCMA leaders have been through this training. They have more to learn, more to share and more to offer DCMA and its employees, and they are working together to help make DCMA the employer of choice.

## COHORT PROGRAM for: Supervisors, Managers & Team Leaders

Initiated by District West, the Cohort Program has been adopted for use Agency-wide. The program involves a series of five courses, delivered over a three- to four-month period. To build networking and camaraderie and foster a sense of community, attendees take all classes as a group. This program also serves to commingle the District East and District West workforces and bridge some of the gaps between the two. The goal is to initiate three to four more cohorts this fiscal year (Cohort VI began in February).

**(Opposite)** Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Christina Henke documents tag numbers of personal electrical devices aboard *USS Kitty Hawk*. As a component of the *Kitty Hawk's* electrical safety program, all personal electrical devices plugged into the ship's electrical system must be checked for safety and identified to be within standards. (U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate Airman Joseph R. Schmitt.)